

Michael Hansen

Lamentations 2

Introduction

[Lamentations 2](#) continues many of the themes of [Lamentations 1](#) about the fall of Jerusalem and the weeping of Jerusalem because of the fall.

One distinct difference is the emphasis [Lamentations 2](#) places on the fact that “the Lord” has brought about the devastation in His anger. [Lamentations 2](#) can shock the reader with just how explicit its opening verses are emphasizing this reality.

I mentioned last week that each of the five poems that make up the book of Lamentations contain some time of acrostic structure. [Lamentations 1](#) and 2 both have 22 verses which correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. One of the things this structure serves to represent is the complete nature of the destruction of Jerusalem. God’s wrath is being poured out in full measure, from a-z.

Similar to [Lamentations 1](#), [Lamentations 2](#) also has a description and response structure.

1. Verses 1-8 display the Lord’s anger and wrath
2. Verses 9-17 present the result of the judgement on Jerusalem
3. And verses 18-22 are the response of Jerusalem and a prayer of lament.

The Display of Wrath (vv. 1-8)

In [Lamentations 1](#) there was the acceptance that the devastation had come at the hand of God, but it was not one of the primary themes. However, in [Lamentations 2](#), it is impossible to miss the fact that God is the one who is actively bringing about this destruction.

[Lam 2:1](#) “How **the Lord in his anger** has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud! **He has cast down** from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel; **he has not remembered** his footstool in the day of his anger.”

“**The LORD has swallowed up** without mercy”, “in His wrath **he has broken down**”, “**He has brought down** to the ground”, “**He has cut down** in fierce anger”, “**He has withdrawn** from them his right hand”, “**He has burned like a flaming fire** in Jacob,” “**He has bent his bow** like an enemy”

Similar to [Lamentations 1](#) the description of the devastation is an inversion of what has already happened in Israel’s history.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt he covered them with his cloud as a covering. Now however, daughter Zion is covered under a cloud of God’s anger.

When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against Moses and Aaron, the ground swallowed them up. Now, the “habitations of Jacob” are swallowed up “without Mercy”.

After the flood, God set his “war bow” in the sky as a sign that he would never flood the earth again. But here, God has bent his bow like an enemy of daughter Zion.

In verses 6-7 the language is clear that the destruction of the Temple is in view. God has “laid waste his booth like a garden” and “laid his meeting place in ruins”.

All the festivals and Sabbath celebrations that were associated with the Temple are undone and instead it is the enemy who celebrates and holds festival in Jerusalem.

The climax of this description comes in verse 8 where God “stretched out” his “measuring line” to destroy the walls and ramparts of Jerusalem.

Here God is an architect, but he is an architect of destruction. In [Gen 1-2](#) God is described like and architect of the creation. In Ezekiel’s description of the eschatological temple God calls for a measuring line to measure the temple. Here, God is precise like an architect in his destruction of Jerusalem.

- › **And what we are to learn from all of this is a very sobering lesson. The lesson is that when a civilization experiences decline and devastation, it comes from**

God's hand. Too often we consider the crumbling and unravelling of the world around us as chiefly the result of political and cultural forces. These may be the efficient or material causes, but they are not the formal cause.

- › At the end of the day, God is the one orchestrating and carrying out such devastation. His ways are above our ways. But the mature and Christian response to such things is to accept this reality and to repent.
- › In [Luke 13](#) some ask Jesus about a horrifying event that had recently taken place where Pontius Pilate mingled the blood of some Galilean men with animal sacrifices. Jesus' response shocks his audience as he says, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
- › As devastating events occur around us, the proper response is to acknowledge that (A) God is sovereign and (B) to repent of our own sin and to rest in God's forgiveness.

The Consequences of Wrath (vv. 9-17)

In verses 8-17 there are four couplets that speak about the result of the devastating wrath of God.

Loss of Godly Leaders

The first is in verses 9-10 where the leaders of Jerusalem are no more. ***"her king and princes are among the nations; the law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from YHWH. The elders of daughter Zion sit on the ground in silence."***

We live in an egalitarian, libertarian, and individualistic age. Many modern people view authority at best a necessary evil. In the Bible, however, godly kings, princes, judges, prophets, and priests are all held in the highest regard. The kings of Israel are said to be like God as they exercise their authority.

One of the first things that God does as he exercises his wrath over a civilization is he removes good leaders and authority from them. We have been experiencing this for quite some time in "the West" and it has led many Christians to view authority (both in government and in the church) as

inherently bad. But this would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. This is part of the reason why we pray for our civil authorities and for ministers in the church each week in our “Prayer for the church and the world”. It is because God has ordained these positions and as they rightly **pursue the good and punish the evil** they are worthy of honor.

Jerusalem experienced God’s wrath in having her leaders removed from her. Let us rightly read our own time in history as we too experience a dearth godly authority throughout our society.

Suffering of Children

The second is in verses 11-12 where the subject is the suffering of the children in Jerusalem. “**infants and babies faint in the streets of the city**” and “**their life is poured out on their mothers’ bosom.**”

Children are a sign of the future of a civilization. They represent life and hope and legacy. The second consequence of God’s wrath is that the future and hope of the society is removed as their children are taken from them.

Of course this too is very prevalent in our society. The starkest and most wicked example of this is the murder of innocence that occurs through abortion. Beyond this, there is the self-imposed barrenness that our society has embraced through the almost universal acceptance of all contraceptive. Then there are all the other ways in which the future is taken from us as our children are lost through the education system, our entertainment culture, and the idolatry of career and mammon.

Too Late to Turn Back

The third couplet showing the consequence of God’s wrath is in verses 13-14 where it is too late for a prophetic vision to be of any use to the city. “**Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.**”

When David was ensnared in the sins of adultery and murder, the grace of God to him was to send the prophet Nathan to David to convict him of his sin. But

when God's wrath comes upon a people, the prophets come speaking smooth words calling "**good evil and evil good**" ([Is 5:20](#)).

One does not have to look far in our day to find so called "prophets" in churches, seminaries, and Christian ministries who are willing and evil to give false and deceptive visions in order to gain credibility with the world around them.

Gloating Enemies

The final couplet is found in verses 15-16 where the enemies of God's people gloat over the fall of Jerusalem. They "**clap their hands**" and "**his and wag their heads**" Jerusalem. They cry: "**We have swallowed her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; now we have it; we see it!**"

Again, it is easy to look around us and see all of these things present in our culture. Godly leaders are missing, our hope of a future seems bleak, false prophets pervade the church, and the enemies of God gloat over their supposed triumph.

But here too we must learn to read Lamentations as Christian Scripture. For verses 15 and 16 have been seen by the church as a reference to Jesus' death on the cross where he suffered under the wrath of God. Satan and all those who stand opposed to the Lord and His anointed clapped their hands and gloated in what they thought was their victory.

As Jesus hung on the cross and was taken into the tomb they gloated, "**We have swallowed him up! This is the day we longed for; now we have it, we see it!**"

But the story doesn't end there. Jesus rose from the dead conquering the power of death, sin, and the devil.

And so even though we can still see the presence of God's wrath in our society, Christians must always live in the hope of the resurrection. This is not the first time in history that a society has been given over to its own devices by God. The church has been through things like this before and the church has always come through the other side. Yes, there is pain and suffering, but nowhere are we promised the avoidance of pain and suffering.

Our resurrected Lord has poured the Holy Spirit fourth in His church and we live in resurrection power. Neither death, nor anything else can stand against us. Let

us not wallow before the forces of evil but rather follow Christ, to the cross in repentance, into the tomb in humility, and up from the grave in victory.

The Response to Wrath (vv. 18-22)

The passage concludes with the response to the poured out wrath of God.

In verses 18-19, Jerusalem is exhorted to pray and cry out to God. And in verses 20-22, a prayer is offered.

The people of God who are living through the wrath of God are called to “**give themselves no rest**” but to “**cry out in the night**” and “**pour out their heart like water before the presence of the Lord.**”

In [Joel 2:13-14](#) the prophet told Israel to “**Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?**”

The concluding prayer of [Lamentations 2](#) does not offer much hope. But what it does is it calls on God to “**Look and see**” how he has dealt with his people. The rhetorical question present is whether God will see the plight of his people and show mercy and kindness to them even though their plight is the result of their own sin and God’s judgement on their sin.

Of course the Bible answers this question. Both for nations and individuals, the Bible offers hope in the face of despair. Because the God of the Bible does “**look and see**”.

Despite the fact that the predicament we find ourselves in **is wholly the result of our own sin.** Moreover, God’s own wrath against that sin is the biggest threat against us. God himself has made a way in Christ by Christ satisfying the wrath of God and paying the penalty for sin on our behalf through the shed blood of Christ.

Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord, but do so knowing that God’s wrath was poured out on Christ so that your petition may be heard and so that God’s grace and mercy might be poured out into your heart.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.